

The Real Self.

BY ARTHUR E. MASSEY.

"I expound in half a verse what has been told in a million volumes:— THAT is the Truth, the world is illusion, the soul is none other than THAT."

—(*Upadeśasāhasri*)

The idea of separateness in the little ego is an illusion. The real Self knows no separateness; for "no man liveth unto himself." One has only to consider that numbers of people spend their lives in considering and ministering to the needs of other people. The mother spends her life thinking almost day and night about her babe and her other children, spending all her thoughts and efforts over them. You might call her selfish. She certainly is, but her selfishness extends beyond the little ego-body, extends to the needs of her children around her. And, again, the husband who is toiling for the support of the family in some way—he is thinking and working and toiling and suffering for his wife and children, and his "self", which is still his restricted "Real Self", which extends over a still larger area than the case just mentioned. Or, a man identifies himself with some society, or church, or to a Social Reform Movement, and a large part of his activity is ruled by the interests of this larger body to which he belongs.

Or again, he sacrifices his life for the defence of his country. At this moment thousands of heroic

Chinese men and women are dedicating their lives with extraordinary bravery, for the sake of their native land. The "self" in their case extends far beyond the little "local" man who readily faces death for the sake of the others to whom he belongs. In that case his "self" is a far wider thing than the ego personality of the man himself.

Or again, a man gives his life and goes to the stake for his religion. Whether his religion is right or wrong in the eyes of other people, in his own eyes it carries him far away beyond himself and his local desires, the instincts of his body and mind, to dedicate himself to that great power which he realizes beyond his limited restricted self. What a profound vast Reality this "self" is, which we are, and how deep down it goes! How deep, we know not. We cannot follow it out. We can only say that this Real Self—the Self that determines our aims and thoughts and moves us from day to day, sometimes more, sometimes less—is amazingly profound, so deep that we have never fathomed the depths of it.

In the ordinary commonplace life we shrink to ordinary commonplace selves, but it is one of the blessings of great experiences, even though they are tragic or painful, that they throw us out into that enormously

greater Self to which we belong. Sometimes, in moments of inspiration, of intense enthusiasm, of revelation, such as a man feels when risking his life in fire or water to save others, or in moments of love and dedication to another person, and in moments of religious inspiration, an immense world is opened up for the astonished gaze of the inner man, who sees a self stretched down far beyond anything he had ever imagined. Most of us have experiences more or less of that kind.

Many years ago I ascended Mount Snowden alone, and on reaching the summit (3,500 ft.) I sat down to meditate. Soon the mountain and its surroundings disappeared, and my body no longer held me a prisoner. In an ecstasy of unutterable freedom I was one with the palpitating ether all limitations had vanished, I was not conscious of the body or of personality. Just to be the conscious life of everything even for a few moments was a very wonderful experience. To me the whole Universe was a picture of unimaginable beauty. I knew for the first time the meaning of true happiness.

All the world's religions and philosophies could not yield a tithe of the inspiration those few moments of transcendental bliss did. Theologies, "isms" and "cults" seemed to vanish into mere nothingness, only the Self without a second remained, and *I was one with the Self*, the personality or little ego being in absolute abeyance. I saw into the heart of creation, I sensed my union with

the rest of mankind, I glimpsed the strange immortality which was mine from all time and before time.

Although so brief an experience, it was a revelation which entirely altered my viewpoint of what is generally understood as "life". It coloured all the rest of my life. If one looks deep within the soul, the great Self is seen as the illimitable Space within which everything moves and changes while it does not move at all.

"Comest thou to inhabit me?
Thou hast the entrance of all life."

That is obviously true.

"Death shall no longer divide thee from him whom thou lovest. I am the sun, which shines upon all creatures from within. Gaze thou upon Me, and thou shalt be filled with joy eternal."

When we once recognize the Oneness of life in the One and only Self, all sense of difference and separateness disappears. The world in which we live denies this principle *in toto*. It is a world in which the principle of separation rules. Instead of the principle of a common life and of union with each other being recognized, especially in these later days of our so-called civilization, the contrary principle has obtained to such an extent that there always is the idea of separation—that every person is an isolated separate unit. The whole of our society has been founded on this delusive idea of separation, which is false.

You go into the markets—every man's hand is against the others—

that is the principle. Go into the Law-courts where justice is, or should be, administered—the principle which denies justice is the one which prevails. The whole principle of property which rules and determines our modern civilization is the same, as “proper” to you, what is yours, and not to others. That is the principle of separation which comes to us in the shape of the sense of sin. For sin is separation. Sin is actually the separation from others and the non-acknowledgement of unity. And so it has come about that in this period, when this separation has become so prominent, the sense of sin has ruled and ranged to an appalling degree. Society is built upon a false principle, not true to fact or to life. This subject of ‘The Self’ has exercised the minds of men from the dawn of history. Certain schools of thought were thinking and meditating upon these problems.

Located as these sages were in forests of Northern India, schools arose there. In the case of each school some teacher went into the woods and gathered groups of disciples around him, who lived there in his company and listened to his words. Such schools, we are told, were formed in very considerable numbers, and the teachings of these teachers were gathered together, generally by their disciples, in notes, and brought together into little pamphlets forming the books called the “Upaniṣad” of the Indian sages. They contain the quintessence of wisdom. They were flashes of intuition and experience, and all through the “Upaniṣad” you

find these extraordinary flashes embedded in the midst of a great deal of a rather rubbishy kind of argument, and a good deal of merely conventional Brahmanical talk of those days. But the people who wrote and talked these things had an intuition into the heart of things, which very few people in modern life have had.

These Upaniṣads, however various their subjects, practically agree on one point—in the definition of the “Self”, in saying that the self of each man is continuous and identical with the Self of the Universe. That is the conclusion, that is the thread which runs all through the “Upaniṣad”—the identity of the self of each individual with the self of every other individual throughout mankind and even creatures and all life. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is a later book, the author speaks of *him whose soul is purified, whose self is the self of all creatures.*

Now what does it mean—*whose soul is purified*? It means this, that with most of us our souls are not very thoroughly purified, and all the time we are continually making clouds between us and others. We are all the time grasping things from other people, and if not in words, we are mentally boasting ourselves against other people, trying to think of our own superiority to the rest of the people around us. Sometimes we try to run our neighbours down a little, just to show that they are not quite equal to our level. We try to snatch from others some things which belong to them, or take to ourselves things

to which we are not quite fairly entitled. Now all the time we are doing that it is perfectly obvious that we are wearing veils between ourselves and others. You cannot have dealings with another person in a purely truthful way, and be all the time trying to cheat them out of money, or out of their good name and reputation. So long as your soul is not purified from all these really absurd and ridiculous little desires and superiorities and self-satisfactions, you cannot see the truth. But when it happens to a person, as it does happen in times of great and deep and better experience,—when it happens that all these trumpery little objects of life are swept away, then occasionally, with astonishment the soul sees that it is also the soul of the others around. It sees that there is a deep relationship and communion, even if there is no absolute surface identity, and then it occurs to the soul that is purified, that the Self is seen to be the Self of all creatures.

Let us take another passage out of the “Śwetāśvatara” which, speaking of the Self, says:

“He is the one God, hidden in all creatures, all-pervading, the self within all, watching over all works, shadowing all creatures, the witness, the perceiver, the only one free from qualities.”

“The Witness.” Most of us have that curious feeling sometimes, especially in moments of extreme experience and emotion, that there is at the back of our mind a witness, watching everything that is going

on, something deeper than the little ego-self. “The Witness” is a very common expression in the “Upaniṣad”.

“Free from qualities.” We generally pride ourselves a little on our qualities. Some of us are rather proud of our good qualities and some of us are rather ashamed of our bad qualities.

What really matters is that we should not hide our soul from others. If your soul is purified, your self will be “the Self of all creatures”, and then the other things do not much matter.

Sometimes people are so awfully good that their goodness hides them from other people. They really cannot be on a level with other people, their “goodness” isolates and puts them on a pedestal. They feel that the other people are a good deal below them. Consequently their self is blinded by their “goodness”. It is rather sad! And very bad people, because they are so bad, do not lift up any screens or veils between them and others. They are only too glad if others will recognize them, or if they may be allowed to recognize the other person. Perhaps, after all, they are nearer the truth than the very good people.

“The Self is free from qualities.” *That* which is so deep, that belongs to all, is all, either has all qualities or it has none. My fellow-creatures’ qualities, good and bad, are all mine. I am perfectly willing to accept them. But in accepting all qualities we

pass below all. We are free from qualities then, because when there are so many it does not very much matter.

When one reaches that state of mind, it is a most extraordinary experience; life appears so very different. To feel that there are no barriers in the way, that the way is open in all directions, that all men and women are essentially One, and that the dominating idea of separateness is an illusion—a mere figment of the mind, truly this is to be free!

The "Upaniṣad" says:—

"The happiness belonging to a mind which, through deep understanding, has been washed clean, and has entered into the Self, is a thing beyond the power of words to describe: it can only be perceived by an inner faculty."

It is not much good arguing about it. Probably the only thing which brings it is experience. Another text says:—

"If a man worships the Self, only as his true state, his work cannot fail; for whatsoever he deserves that he gets from the Self."

What a magnificent text! If a man devotes himself to realizing the great Self as his real state, his work cannot fail: whatever he desires he obtains from the Self. And it is pretty obvious that he does, because if you realize your identity with the great Self that leads the world, then

whatever you desire, obviously that Self desires, and all the world would conspire to bring it to you. "He maketh the winds His angels, and flaming fires his ministers." To realize the Self, the little self—the presumptuous ego—must cease to function.

"Give up thy life if thou wouldst live."

All that separates us from our fellows must go—even our smug goodness; for the moment one congratulates himself on being so good, or superior in any way, in that moment he proclaims a sin, because he separates himself.

When one is genuinely good, he does not know about it. We can only be really good and really moral when we are not aware that we are.

Other people, of course, may be aware, and that may be some consolation. To bear our cross is to recognize the sins of the world as our own and our own responsibility. This recognition of the oneness of life in the one self would revolutionize modern society, the basis and foundation of which is the illusion of separateness.

"The power of sun, moon, fire and even of speech having exhausted itself, the senses being all extinguished, *That* which stands self-illuminated, beyond all relations, sending forth this universe of ideas, and all thought, is shown to be the Inner Self of all."

